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# Battle Cry

Founded 1961,  
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table  
P.O. BOX 254702  
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<http://sacramentocwrt.com/>



## President's Message

Greetings everyone I hope all of you had a Happy Easter.

During war time, there is usually a lot of significant inventions and improvements of existing products made. In World War I, there was the advancement of the airplane and the improvement of can foods and the Improvement of SONAR. During World War II, there was the creation of the Atom Bomb; RADAR; SCUBA Gear, SPAM, and the implementation of the jet fighter. During the Civil War, there was the improvements of the Repeating Rifle; the use of Ambulances; the use of Air Balloons. The invention of Right and Left shoes (prior to the Civil War all shoes were the same) and the advancement of embalming.

The Question for all of you is what do you think was the most significant invention or improvement made during the Civil War?

As for me I think it was the invention of the Ironclad Warship, because it helped win the Battles of the Monitor and the Merrimac; the Battle of Mobile Bay, and most importantly, the Battle of Vicksburg. The Inventions of the Ironclad also made all other Navies in the World obsolete and for the first time ever the US Navy passed up Great Britain as the most powerful Navy in the World.

Have a Happy April.

**James C. Juanitas, President**

**MINUTES**  
**SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**  
**Wednesday, March 13, 2024**  
**Denny's Restaurant, 3520 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento**

**ATTENDANCE – 17**

**MEMBERS – 17:** James Juanitas, President; Carol Breiter, Vice President; George W. Foxworth, Treasurer; Jean Breiter, Harvey & Marsha J. Cain, Mark Carlson, Arnd Gartner, Ron Grove, (MAL); Wayne & Nina Henley, Joe (MAL) & Michelle Matalone, Stuart & Andrea Sheffield, Stephen Shiflett, & Peggy Tveden.

**GUESTS – 0:** None.

1. The meeting was called to order by President James Juanitas at 7:02 PM and he led the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. President Juanitas asked for volunteers for the three vacant Board positions. There were no responses. He gave a summary of the recent Monterey Conference. The March 23 - 24 Knights Ferry Re-enactment was mentioned. Also, Facebook by Carol Breiter.
3. New Members and Guests were introduced. No new Members and no Guests were present.
4. The raffle was conducted by Joe & Michelle Matalone. Books, wine, and other items were offered as prizes. The raffle raised \$30.00.
5. President Juanitas introduced the speaker, Arnd Gartner. His topic was "In Defense of Hooker." Hooker was born in Hadley, Massachusetts, the grandson of a Captain in the American Revolutionary War. He graduated from West Point in 1837, ranked 29th out of a class of 50, and became a Second Lieutenant in the 1st U.S. Artillery.
6. His initial assignment was in Florida fighting in the second of the Seminole Wars. He served in the Mexican-American War in staff positions in the campaigns of both Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. His future Army reputation as a ladies' man began in Mexico, where local women referred to him as the "Handsome Captain."
7. After the Mexican–American War, he served as an Assistant Adjutant General of the Pacific Division, but resigned his commission in 1853; his military reputation had been damaged when he testified against his former commander, General Scott, in the court-martial for insubordination of Gideon Johnson Pillow. General Scott never forgave him.
8. Hooker settled in Sonoma County, California, as a farmer and land developer, and ran unsuccessfully for election to represent the region in the California Legislature. From 1859 to 1861, he held a commission as a colonel in the California Militia.
9. At the start of the Civil War in 1861, Hooker requested a commission, but his first application was rejected. He wrote a letter to President Lincoln that promoted his own qualifications, and again requested a commission. He was appointed, in August 1861, as Brigadier General of Volunteers to rank from May 17. He commanded a Brigade and then Division around Washington, D.C., as part of the effort to organize and train the Army of the Potomac, under Major General McClellan.
10. Hooker was defeated by General Lee at Chancellorsville which gave Lee the initiative to travel north to Gettysburg. Later in 1863, Hooker was transferred to the Western Front for the Atlanta Campaign. After leaving Georgia, Hooker commanded the Northern Department (comprising the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois), headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, from October 1, 1864, until the end of the War.
11. After questions and answers, the evening ended at 8:00 PM.
12. The next Executive Board Meeting is Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 10:00 AM, at Brookfields near Madison and I-80. All members and guests are welcome.

**George W. Foxworth for Vacant, Secretary**

**Treasurer's Report**

The cash balance on March 13th was \$5,258.71. Thanks to Joe & Michelle Matalone and members, the raffle brought in \$30.00.

**George W. Foxworth, Treasurer**

# Coming Programs for 2024

Date	Speaker	Topic
April 10th	"Tim Karlberg"	"Civil War Spies in California"
May 8th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
June 12th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
July 10th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
August 14th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
September 11th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"

## 2024 Membership

The 2024 membership renewal is due on January 1, 2024. The dues are \$30.00 and you can renew at a meeting or send to the Treasurer through the mail. For all checks, make them payable to **Sacramento Civil War Round Table** and send them to:

George W. Foxworth  
9463 Salishan Court  
Sacramento, CA 95826-5233

## NEWSLETTER CIVIL WAR ARTICLES

Civil War articles/book reviews are welcome. The submission deadline is the first day of each month for that month's **Battle Cry**. However, you can submit articles at anytime. Please submit your items in Microsoft Word or regular email to:

[gwfoxworth@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gwfoxworth@sbcglobal.net)

The **Battle Cry** is the monthly newsletter of the Sacramento CWRT. Submissions are subject to availability of space and size limitations. Submissions do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization or the Editor. The official address of this organization is: Sacramento Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 254702, Sacramento, CA 95865-4702. <http://www.sacramentocwrt.org> is the web site address. Check the web for past newsletter editions and information about the group.

## **Friends of Civil War Alcatraz**

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz (FOCWA) is a group of individuals interested in the Civil War history of Alcatraz island. We are made up of teachers, veterans, historians, and others who like to research and read about how Alcatraz became an important Fort for the protection of San Francisco during the Civil War.

Some of our members are also National Park Service volunteers who assist the rangers in giving public programs, in uniform, about the Union soldiers stationed on the Island and interesting events that occurred there between 1859 and 1865. We publish a newsletter every month, which can be found on our website [www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org](http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org).

We also visit schools and organizations to tell that early history of the Island, long before it became the notorious Federal prison. And we conduct living history days twice a year, in conjunction with the American Civil War Association, to give the public an idea of what the Island was like as a Union Fort.

**Submitted by Steve Johnson**

# William Laird

William H. "Billy Boy" Laird was born on January 1, 1833, in Berwick, Maine. He was considered to be "slow" from an early age but it never stopped him from working with his father on the family farm or forming relationships with the other boys in his town.

When War came, he headed out to enlist with his long-time friends. His father was either unable to stop him or didn't try to. The recruiters saw no reason to say he was not fit for military service merely because he signed his name with an X.

Billy was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry Regiment, Company G, at Camp King, Cape Elizabeth, on August 18, 1862. He had signed up for a three-year hitch with an initial bonus of \$27 (about \$650 in today's economy.)

Billy's friends had always protected him and being in the Army made no difference. He was cared for and treated fairly by the men who had known him his entire life. He seemed to be able to hold his own when it came to his duties. Perhaps his friends helped him.

Unfortunately things changed. As soon as his superiors realized that Billy was mentally unfit, on October 11, he was transferred to a new unit, an artillery battery at Edwards Ferry, Maryland. It was decided rather than sending home a valuable extra source of man power, Billy was capable of tending to the horses.

Billy hated his new assignment. The men in his unit mistreated and teased him mercilessly. He fell for their cruel ruses time and again. Once separated from his longtime champions, Billy was unable to exist within a group of strangers who cared nothing about his welfare.

Billy had had enough. He gathered his gear and headed back to Berwick, Maine. No one knows how he got there unaided. Billie said he had followed the North Star.

Military records show that it wasn't long before he was tracked to his home. When the officers found him, he was standing in an open field, holding a pitchfork. There was a scuffle, but Billy was overtaken, handcuffed, and arrested for desertion. Brought to a nearby farmhouse, he somehow was able to grab a pistol, but threw it to the ground when he was challenged.

On July 2, 1863, he was court martialed at Camp Keys in Augusta. His original unit, the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine, was defending Cemetery Ridge in Gettysburg that very day. The Military Court found Billy guilty of desertion and sentenced him to be executed by a firing squad. Sixteen other soldiers were tried for desertion in Augusta the same day as Billy. Most were sentenced to hard labor. One other man was

condemned to death but the clergy intervened and he was exonerated. No one came forward to beg for Billy's life. His mental disability was apparently not an excuse for the court. On the day that Billy was sentenced to death, the Lewiston Evening Journal reported that, "...a woman, a one armed man and a man with a prosthetic leg were all drafted that week." Seemingly, the military welcomed with open arms almost anyone who wanted to enlist.

It was rumored that General John Wool, Commander of the Department of the East, had ordered a stay of execution for William Laird pending a Presidential Review. His telegram came too late. The telephone wires in New York City which would relay the message from Washington, DC, to Maine had been cut during the July 1863 Draft Riots.

On July 15, 1863, Private Billy Boy Laird was brought out of his cell, blindfolded and made to kneel by his coffin facing a firing squad at Fort Preble on the South Portland waterfront. Twelve men of the 17<sup>th</sup> Maine were handed muskets. One musket held a blank.

When asked if he would like to say some last words, Billy admitted that he, "...had deserted, denied any assault on his officers and begged the men to do their work effectually."

The soldiers took aim and shot. It was exactly 2:38 pm. Billy was hit with nine bullets. "Five bullets passed through his heart, one through his right breast and one through his left shoulder, one through his throat and another through his right cheek."

Laird was the only Maine soldier in the Civil War to be executed for desertion on the soil of his home state. Military court records do not mention his intellectual handicap. They merely state, "William Laird H., d. July 15, 1863, aged 30 yrs., 6 mos., 14 days. Firing Squad. Desertion."

A soldier, Henry Frost, who was present and witnessed Billy's death, cut two buttons from his vest. "One is for mother and the other for grandmother." The Frost family claims to still have the button. The story may be apocryphal. "All Civil War death sentences were carried out under strict uniform rules which included executing soldiers in civilian clothes and placing their bodies face down in their coffins as a sign of disgrace." True or not, it is a good story.



At the time of his death, Billy was considered a coward who got what he deserved. The Army chose to keep the execution private as morale throughout the country was at an all-time low with the rising body count of Union soldiers. Portland newspapers delayed reporting on the execution for two days. When the story appeared, it was on the inside pages and ended with “Let’s have no more skedaddling.” The only reference to Billy’s mental health in the article was that the young man was “Executed as a Deserter but Irresponsible.”



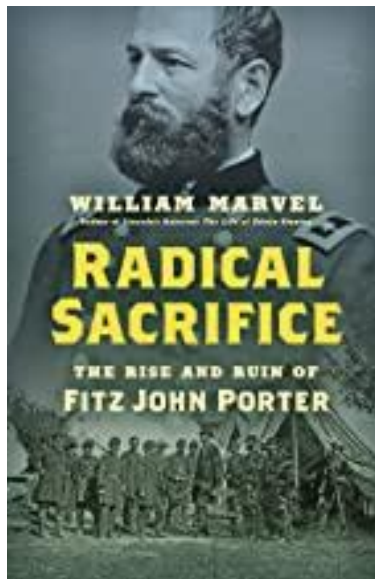
Billy’s parents came to Augusta with a wagon to carry their son home. He is buried in what once were the hayfields of the Laird farm where he had worked alongside his father. The burial site is known simply as the William Laird Cemetery, only holding one solitary grave. Long ago the tombstone fell to the ground and broke into two pieces.

**Submitted by Judith Breitstein**

## Radical Sacrifice: The Rise and Ruin of Fitz John Porter

By William Marvel. 2022-095. 7 Oct. 2022. Review by Ralph M. Hitchens, Poolesville, MD. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. xv, 471. ISBN 978-1-4696-6185-8.

Descriptors Volume 2022: 19th Century, US Civil War, Fitz John Porter, Union Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter, the "forgotten man" of the American Civil War, was wrongly accused of disobeying orders and losing the Second Battle of Manassas (28–30 Aug. 1862). He was court-martialed and dismissed from the Army, a victim of jealous senior officers and radical Republican politicians who despised his loyalty to Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, Commander of the Army of the Potomac. President Abraham Lincoln stood aloof from this "kangaroo court," but approved of its verdict—not his finest hour. Indeed, *Radical Sacrifice* is a studied indictment of the President. Sixteen years later, Porter was exonerated when a Board of Officers chaired by the Superintendent of West Point reexamined the documentary record and concluded that "he had been entirely innocent and had not contributed to the defeat at Second Bull Run at all, deliberately or otherwise" (xii).



Author William Marvel is an independent scholar and prolific writer of books on the Civil War. His latest volume is firmly grounded in official records, personal correspondence, and memoirs of the soldiers and politicians involved in the controversy. The book proceeds chronologically through Porter's life. A last chapter concerns his daughter's efforts to restore his reputation after Congress reversed the judgment of the court-martial.

Fitz John Porter was the son of an undistinguished naval officer. His widowed mother gave him a good education and engineered his admission to West

Point. Commissioned into the artillery branch in 1845, he proved to be a fine soldier. He distinguished himself in the Mexican War and later received brevet promotions to Captain and Major—a signal honor for a young officer. Porter was a creditable staff officer in momentous events before the Civil War, for instance, the pursuit of John Brown in "Bleeding Kansas" and the "Utah War" that brought the truculent Mormon government to heel—an arduous expedition spanning a thousand miles.

When the Civil War broke out, Porter was dispatched to Texas by the Army's Commanding General, Winfield Scott. He gathered hundreds of Federal troops from garrisons in the Rio Grande Valley and evacuated them by sea before the State's commanding general, who had defected to the Confederacy, could imprison them. In fall 1861, Porter's longtime friend McClellan, now a Major General, received Command of the Army of the Potomac and soon succeeded Scott as the Army's General in Chief. "Little Mac" promoted Porter to Brigadier General and gave him Command of a Division and then a Corps. As McClellan's "point man," he distinguished himself in some of the hardest fighting of the Peninsular Campaign (Spring 1862). He also "took a keen interest in a novel means of detecting threatening enemy movements" (86–87). He made several balloon ascents with Prof. Thaddeus Lowe and became his most influential supporter.

The Peninsular campaign was the most original strategic approach undertaken in the Eastern Theater, but McClellan's constant overestimates of Rebel troop strength caused operational paralysis. When the Army of the Potomac reached the outskirts of Richmond, it was met by a mismanaged Confederate assault at Seven Pines, after which Gen. Robert E. Lee replaced the wounded Joseph E. Johnston in Command of the newly renamed Army of Northern Virginia. The Union Army straddled the Chickahominy River, flooded by Spring rains. Only Porter's V Corps was left on the North bank to guard McClellan's right flank. Lee, with the largest army he ever commanded, moved North of the Chickahominy and unleashed the Seven Days Battles by attacking the isolated V Corps. Porter conducted a splendid defense against increasingly heavy odds until forced to retreat at the close of the second day. While this battle was raging, the rest of the Army of the Potomac sat idle before the Richmond fortifications, deceived by the much weaker Rebel forces. Had McClellan dared to attack while most of Lee's Army was North of the Chickahominy, he might well have captured Richmond. Instead he retreated to stand on the defensive along the James River. At Malvern Hill, the culmination of the Seven Days Battles, McClellan again put Porter in charge with the V Corps, defending the high ground. Lee, showing the blind combativeness he later displayed at Gettysburg, launched a costly frontal assault that took heavy casualties.



McClellan's failure before Richmond badly hurt his reputation, and the Administration replaced him as the Army's General in Chief with Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, summoned from the Western Theater. Halleck brought with him a favored subordinate, Maj. Gen. John Pope, who was given Command of the newly formed Army of Virginia, which would include troops from McClellan's Army withdrawing from the peninsula. Porter's V Corps was among the units transferred to Pope.

Porter, always a "team player," was inflexibly loyal to his superiors. Nevertheless, he was sowing the seeds of his own downfall. Circumspect within the chain of command, "to his ultimate regret, he maintained communication with civilians whose influence he valued and whose discretion he overestimated" (182). He was also indiscreet with trusted army friends; as a result, too many of Porter's unfiltered opinions circulated among his enemies within the Lincoln Administration. Writing to a friend who was an influential journalist, Porter "advised putting no faith in Pope or anything he said, noting his reputation for prevarication in the Old Army," where "he was never known to tell the truth when he could gain his object by a falsehood" (186). Still, he lost no time when ordered to join the Army of Virginia: "For all his mutinous invective about Pope deserving defeat, Porter moved quickly to go to his aid" (188).

Pope's reputation for dishonesty and overweening ego alienated most of the senior officers in the Army of Virginia, whose attitude to him was summarized by Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams: "more insolence, superciliousness, ignorance, and pretentiousness were never combined in one man" (189). Pope was clearly unequal to the challenge posed by Robert E. Lee. Despite his heavy losses in the Seven Days Battles, Lee had evicted the Army of the Potomac from the vicinity of Richmond. The Union high command, meanwhile, was in disarray: two Federal armies were a considerable distance apart and unable to cooperate. Stonewall Jackson, on the heels of an unimpressive performance during the Seven Days battles, now reverted to the aggressive soldier who had confounded Union armies in the Shenandoah Valley. With Pope's army secure behind the flooded Rappahannock, Jackson assayed a bold flanking maneuver—marching his Corps over fifty miles in two days, reaching the major Union supply depot at Bristoe Station, deep in Pope's rear. After pillaging the depot, Jackson took a strong defensive position along the Warrenton Pike. He would be the "anvil" while Lee and the other half of the Army of Northern Virginia, under Gen. James Longstreet, would follow as the "hammer" against the left flank of Pope's Army.

When Pope finally located Jackson, he redeployed his troops to confront him, with Porter's Corps on the left flank. Porter suspected, correctly, that more

Confederate troops were massing on the Union left and he warned Pope that Longstreet had probably arrived to join Jackson's troops. Pope disregarded Porter's warning, and Longstreet's attack on the afternoon of 30 August crushed the Union forces, driving the survivors eastward. General Pope lost no time finding someone to blame for this disaster.

Porter's court-martial hinged on three issues: two allegations of disobedience of orders, and his indiscreet communications with friends and fellow officers expressing distrust of Pope. Most damning in the latter category was a dispatch to Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside widely circulated within the Administration and regarded as proof of his disloyalty to Pope. Disobedience of orders was a more serious matter, however. On 27 August 1862, Porter received an order from Pope for V Corps to leave its bivouac at 1:00 AM and march to Bristoe Station. Porter's troops, however, were exhausted from a long march, and the narrow road to Bristoe Station was known to be jammed with supply wagons. Porter decided that it was within his discretion as a Corps Commander to delay his march and give the men two extra hours of rest. Pope obviously did not agree.

The other charge should have been easier to refute, but the circumstances became murky in the recollections of the principals. At 4:30 on 29 Aug. 1862, General Pope wrote out an order for Porter to attack the flank and rear of Stonewall Jackson's Corps. However, neither Jackson nor V Corps were where Pope imagined them to be. Instead, as Porter had already discovered, there were masses of Confederate troops to his front—Longstreet's Corps arriving from the West, which heavily outnumbered the V Corps. Furthermore, Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell was the senior Union officer on Pope's left, and Porter was under his orders. McDowell appropriated one of Porter's Divisions and departed after advising Porter's Chief of Staff, Col. Frederick T. Locke, that Porter should remain where he was, and retreat if necessary. With darkness approaching and strong enemy forces ahead of him, Porter—covered by McDowell's verbal instructions to his Chief of Staff—sensibly refrained from attacking. At the trial, McDowell failed to recall what he said, or to whom. Porter's lawyers did what could, but their objections were overruled.

William Marvel's book rescues Fitz John Porter from obscurity, but it is difficult reading, particularly in its final chapters. The author leaves no stone unturned in recounting Porter's long road to redemption. Another problem, all too common in military history books, is the lack of adequate maps. Narrative alone cannot adequately capture the ebb and flow of battle.

**Submitted by Bruce A, Castleman, Ph.D**